

FORT GREELY ALASKA ENHANCED USE LEASE (EUL) PROJECT

Environmental Assessment for the Construction of a Primary Care Medical and Lodging Facility and Recreational Vehicle Park

AGENCY: United States (U.S.) Army Garrison Fort Greely

ACTION: DRAFT Finding of No Significant Impact

BACKGROUND: The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the Council of Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA, Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 4715.9, and the applicable service environmental regulations, which implement these laws and regulations, direct DoD officials to consider environmental consequences when authorizing and approving federal actions.

The U.S. Army Garrison Fort Greely has conducted an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the potential environmental consequences of the proposed Fort Greely Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) Project. The proposed action involves construction, operation, and maintenance of a medical and lodging facility and recreational vehicle (RV) park on an approximately 100-acre parcel located on the west side of the Cantonment Area of the Fort Greely installation. The alternatives analyzed in the EA included No Action (Alternative 1), the Proposed Action (Alternative 2), and Alternative 3. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) summarizes the results of the assessment.

Fort Greely, designated as a remote installation, was selected for realignment as part of the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. This designation greatly reduced the population at the installation. In 1999, the DoD announced its intention to further realign Fort Greely by making the installation a key part of Missile Defense Agency's (MDA) Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system, as a host to critical sectors of the Missile Defense Agency (MDA). Soldiers and civilians of Fort Greely work at or support the MDA, the Cold Regions Test Center (CRTC), Garrison (installation) operations and Allen Army Airfield. Fort Greely has steadily been the single largest employer in the Delta Junction area.

The purpose of this project is to provide the products and services required to adequately support the expanded mission of the Army at Fort Greely and associated increases in population in the surrounding Delta region. The increased population needs access to reliable primary medical care, a medical evacuation facility, and more lodging options. Currently, there is one small medical center in the City of Delta Junction and one inadequate lodging facility in use on the installation. The proposed lodging and medical facility and the RV Park would be available for the use by the general public and would serve to support the GMD system.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action under evaluation entails development on an approximately 100-acre parcel of land located on the west side of the Cantonment Area, in the southwest corner of the parcel. The activities include the following:

- Construction, operation, and maintenance of a combined medical center and lodging facility complex;
- Construction, operation, and maintenance of an RV park;
- Construction of perimeter security fencing around the facilities to prevent unauthorized public access of the installation;
- Construction of two paved parking lots, one for the lodging and another for the medical facility;
- Development of an approximately 1,500 foot long access road to the facilities; and

- Construction of a new underground cement utilidor (containing electricity, steam heat, sanitary sewage, and potable water supply) connecting the RV park and medical center/lodging facility to the existing installation utilidor loop.

ALTERNATIVES TO PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative 1 - No Action

There would be no construction of any new facilities to support the missions of the U.S. Army at Fort Greely and Delta Junction community as part of the No Action Alternative.

Alternative 3

This alternative involves construction of the same facilities as described under the Proposed Action, but at a different location, in the northeast corner of the same 100-acre parcel. This area would also be fenced in to prevent unauthorized access to Fort Greely. A new exit for the Richardson Highway would be constructed to provide access to the entrance area of this alternative site development, with a new access road of 1,000 feet in length.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Methodology

All relevant resources were initially evaluated, but only those determined to be affected by the proposed project were carried forward for analysis in the EA. Fifteen areas of environmental consideration were evaluated to provide a context for understanding the potential impacts of the proposed alternatives and to provide a basis for assessing the potential impacts. These areas included air quality, cultural resources, environmental justice, geology and soils, hazardous waste and hazardous material management, land use, noise, public access and recreation, socioeconomics, transportation, utilities, vegetation, visual resources, water resources, and wildlife.

Airspace, fisheries, floodplains, human health and safety, subsistence, threatened and endangered species, and wetland resources were evaluated but eliminated from further discussion because it was determined that there would be no impacts to these resources from the proposed project.

Analysis

For each resource selected for detailed analysis direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts have been described for each alternative. Impact levels identified for each resource brought forward for analysis are based on the duration, extent, intensity, and type of the impact. The type of impact refers to whether the impact is considered beneficial or adverse. Summary impact levels (characterized as negligible, minor, moderate, or major) are given for each impact topic (issue) and are based on standardized impact definitions. These thresholds are defined in the EA and are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Impact Level Thresholds

| Impact Level | Negligible | Minor | Moderate | Major |
|------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Intensity | Little or no impact to the resource would occur (perceptible but difficult to measure). | Change in a resource would occur (perceptible), but without substantial impact. | Noticeable change in a resource would occur, altering the resource's condition or appearance. | Substantial impact or change in a resource area would occur. |
| Extent | None | Localized – Impact would occur only at site or its immediate surroundings. | Regional – Impact would occur on a broad regional level. | Statewide – Impact would occur on a state level. |
| Duration | None | Temporary – Impact would occur only during project construction. | Short-term – Impact would extend beyond the time of construction, up to two years. | Long-term – Impact would likely extend beyond two years, possibly past project lifetime. |

NO ACTION (Alternative 1)

There would be no impacts to any of the resources under the No Action Alternative.

PROPOSED ACTION (Alternative 2)

Air Quality

All construction, operations, and maintenance activities proposed under the Proposed Action would be conducted in accordance with applicable air quality permit requirements, although air quality would potentially be affected through increased emissions during construction, operations and maintenance of the proposed facilities. It is not expected that construction activities would cause exceedances of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) or State of Alaska Ambient Air Quality Standards (AAQS) beyond the immediate construction zone and would not have long-term impact to air quality in the area. Once construction ceased, air quality would be expected to return to its former levels, thereby having a minor impact on air quality. Operations and maintenance under Alternative 2 would not be anticipated to cause exceedances of NAAQS or State of Alaska AAQS, and the potential impacts to air quality would be perceptible (minor), localized (minor), and short term (moderate), therefore, minor overall.

Cultural Resources

Although no known cultural resources are known to be present within the proposed project area, currently unidentified subsurface cultural resources could be disturbed by construction activities. Potential impacts to cultural resources under the Proposed Action would be negligible due to the relatively small surface area of soils that would be removed during construction (6.41 acres) and low probability of the presence of any cultural resources.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action is expected to result in changes in the socioeconomic environment of the area that would benefit minority or low-income populations or communities with the creation of nearby medical and emergency care and employment opportunities at the lodging facility.

Geology and Soils

Potential impacts to geology and soils under the Proposed Action would be negligible due to the relatively small surface area (6.41 acres) of soils that would be removed during construction and the fact that project area soils have been disturbed by previous Army activities and wildland fires. Construction activities would result in short-term but localized, and therefore minor potential impacts to soils. Because no permafrost has been detected within the project area it is assumed that the Proposed Action would not impact permafrost. Facility construction would incorporate earthquake-resistant designs, thereby reducing to negligible the potential impacts occurring from a significant seismic event.

Hazardous Materials and Waste

Some hazardous materials would be used during construction and operation activities, and some hazardous wastes would be generated during construction and maintenance. Potential impacts would be negligible because all hazardous materials and waste management would be consistent with ongoing Fort Greely procedures, as well as applicable federal, state, and local regulations. Installation Restoration Program sites within the project area would not be disturbed during construction. Disposal for all construction-generated hazardous waste would be the responsibility of the general contractor, and would be sent to a licensed disposal location.

Land Use

Development of the Proposed Action would involve only a small percentage of both the available “natural area” and “parks and recreation area” existing land uses on Fort Greely. Existing land use in the project area under the Proposed Action would be altered as a result of the Proposed Action, thereby producing an overall moderate impact. The duration of the impact would be long term, the extent localized, and the intensity moderate.

Existing land uses or any land use change under the Proposed Action would not conflict with any federal, state, or local land use plans or policies.

Noise

The primary source of noise from the Proposed Action would be during the construction phase, including the operation of heavy equipment and associated building construction noise. Noise from construction activities could result in 70 to 98 dBA within a 50-foot radius of construction equipment. However, given the proximity of the project area to existing noise sources (e.g. highway, airfield) the potential impacts of noise from the Proposed Action is expected to be short term and localized during construction (minor overall), and barely perceptible and immeasurable (negligible) during operations and maintenance.

Public Access and Recreation

Recreational areas surrounding the project area (within Fort Greely) could be affected by the Proposed Action, but potential impacts would be negligible because few recreational areas remain within the project area. New fencing installed would alter public access to the area, but there is currently no unrestricted public access allowed on Fort Greely due to National Security reasons.

Socioeconomics

Only beneficial socioeconomic impacts were identified in the EA. The need for lodging currently exists, the presence of a new medical facility would provide enhanced and local primary medical care for the area, and the construction and operation of the proposed facilities would provide increased employment opportunities, all of which would beneficially impact the general socioeconomic environment of the area.

Transportation

The Proposed Action would cause an increase in traffic to and from Fort Greely. Construction-related traffic increases would be temporary and localized (minor), with an estimated increase of 20 vehicles a day on area roads for duration of six months. Traffic estimates during the operations and maintenance phase are estimated at 200 vehicles during the summer and 75 vehicles during the winter. Operational-related traffic increases would be minimized by the construction of new access roads from existing roads, would be short-term in duration, localized in extent, and therefore minor overall.

Utilities

Utility services on Fort Greely (drinking water, wastewater, solid waste, communication, heat, firewater, and electricity) could be affected by the Proposed Action through the increase of demand, production of construction debris, and increased use of GVEA electricity, all of which could be measurable compared to the installation's existing level of usage.

Solid waste generated from the construction and operation of the new facilities would be disposed at the City of Delta Junction Solid Waste Facility, to avoid impacts to Fort Greely's existing landfill. A new firewater well would provide water for firefighting at the new facilities, although the pool would serve as the main firewater source. Increased usage of all other utilities is expected to be within the existing capacities.

The adverse impacts of Alternative 2 on utilities are expected to be mitigated where necessary, as in the case of solid waste and firewater. The potential impact to other area utilities from Alternative 2 would be considered measurable (minor), localized (minor), but long term (major). Overall, the potential impact to utilities from Alternative 2 would be considered minor.

Vegetation

The vegetation within and surrounding the footprints of the Proposed Action facilities would be removed or altered, and invasive plants could colonize bare soils that would be exposed during the construction process. Although no federally designated threatened or endangered species are known to occur within the project area, several "rare" plant species area found on Fort Greely, and could be impacted if removed during construction.

However, considering the mitigation measures that would be implemented (e.g., covering of back slopes and fill slopes with coarse materials), the past disturbance to the area, and relatively small surface area (6.41 acres) of soil that would be removed during construction, the impacts to vegetation under the Proposed Action would be minor.

Visual Resources and Aesthetics

Existing view sheds of the area surrounding Fort Greely and aesthetics could be affected by the presence of new facilities in the Proposed Action area. The proposed buildings would be no more than 45 feet in height and the new construction would be similar to the existing military facilities. Due to the flat topography and the vegetation barriers from roadways, the visual sensitivity is very low, and public views are virtually non-existent. Any potential impacts to visual resources and aesthetics would be very localized and temporary, and therefore negligible.

Water Resources

The flat terrain and permeable soils within the project area would facilitate infiltration of surface water flow, and the spatial separation between the project area and the Delta River to the west and Jarvis Creek to the east (over 1.2 miles to either water body), thereby preventing the transportation of any construction-related sediment to these main surface water bodies. The depth to groundwater on Fort Greely ranges from 175 to 300 feet below ground surface, and it is considered unlikely that any runoff or hazardous materials from construction or operation activities would percolate to the depth of the water table before spill response measures were enacted. For these reasons, the potential impacts to surface and ground water would be barely perceptible and immeasurable; therefore negligible.

Wildlife

Project activity (presence of humans) and noise (from heavy equipment) could disturb wildlife and cause animals to disperse from the project areas. However, human activity already occurs in the proposed project area and an existing fence surrounds the Cantonment Area (including the 100-acre parcel). The fence impedes access to the area by large mammals; however, birds and small mammals could access and utilize the project area for food sources and habitat. Vegetation and soils in the project area have been previously disturbed and there is similar habitat surrounding the project area. There are no federally listed threatened, endangered, or candidate wildlife in the project area, but Migratory Bird Treaty Act-related mitigation measures would be followed during the construction of this project, preventing construction during nesting season. For these reasons, the expected impacts to area wildlife would be temporary and localized at most, and therefore negligible.

ALTERNATIVE 3

The impacts to the resources identified in this analysis would be the same under Alternative 2 as described under the Proposed Action for all resources. For all resources, impacts would stem from the same kind of construction, operations, and maintenance activities. For all resources, the proximity of the two project areas to one another (just 2,500 feet apart and within the same 100-acre parcel) and the similarity of the biological, physical, and human resource characteristics within this small area dictates that the impacts would be the same under either action alternative. The main difference between the alternatives is the footprints of the construction. Under the Proposed Action the footprint would be 6.41 acres and under Alternative 3 it would be 5.69 acres. This difference of only 12 percent is not enough to cause any change in impact assessment for cultural resources, geology and soils, or vegetation.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts result from the action's incremental impacts when these impacts are added to the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions [40 CFR 1508.7]. Cumulative impacts were assessed by combining the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives with the impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions that could contribute direct or indirect impacts to the Fort Greely Installation area.

Past and present actions within the project area, such as previous Army activities, construction, hazardous chemical spills, construction and operations of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, and the 1999 Donnelly Flats Fire combined with future foreseeable development activities on Fort Greely have, and would have, impacts to the resources within the project area. There would be no incremental cumulative impacts from the No Action Alternative because no new construction would occur. Given the localized nature of the proposed EUL project, the small amount of land that would be disturbed, and the existing development in the surrounding area, it is expected that neither of the action alternatives would contribute more than a negligible (barely perceptible and immeasurable) incremental cumulative impact to any of the resources discussed in this analysis, with the exception of electrical utilities, described below.

Electricity in the Delta Junction area is currently provided by the GVEA. There is a concern that power demand may outpace power supply in future years given additional growth in the area. The Missile Defense System, Pogo Gold Mine, and TAPS Pump Station #9 alone are expected to increase system power demand by over 30 Megawatts (MW). While the proposed project would utilize existing power generated by the installation, there is the probability of an indirect increase in electrical demand on Fort Greely through any increase in the area's population. When combined with the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions mentioned above and described in detail in the EA, the construction of the proposed Fort Greely EUL Project under either action alternative could have regional (moderate) and long-term (major), and noticeable (minor) incremental impacts, on area electrical utilities. Therefore, the overall incremental cumulative impacts from either action alternative on area electrical utilities are expected to be moderate.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Most known impacts resulting from implementation of the Proposed Action would be mitigated through project planning and design measures, consultation with appropriate agencies, and the use of Best Management Practices. Therefore, most potential adverse impacts would be avoided, and those that could not be avoided would not result in a significant impact to the environment. Unavoidable environmental impacts that cannot be avoided as a result of the Proposed Action would include the release of minimal amounts of pollutants into the atmosphere; minor impacts on land use, soils, transportation, and vegetation; and beneficial impacts on socioeconomics.

The EA determined that no significant impacts would occur as a result of the construction, operation, and maintenance of a new medical care and lodging facility and new RV park at Fort Greely. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is not required.